

# WEB 2.0

...new models of web publishing are emerging that are more powerful than the ones we knew ... this article seeks to look at Web 2.0 "patterns," or examples of the new thinking that can be used as models for building.

Since the invention of publishing, the power of the press has moved from the wealthy, connected, powerful elite to the masses themselves. At the same time, the audience for all media has grown ever larger. Both trends have accelerated in recent years to the point where a significant slice of humanity now has the ability to publish/broadcast on the Net for free to the same gigantic audience.

When publication (and media creation) is done by the little people, the role of publishing companies becomes building the publishing "contexts" that these people use. MySpace sells more online ads than the New York Times.

## The Web as Platform

The web is beginning to be used as a "platform" rather than a host of websites. This means that you use hosted websites to get your business done rather than relying on software on your own computer's hard drive. Related to this is the notion that the best web apps are simple and useful and can be combined for extra usefulness, even if they are not run by the same companies.

The best Web 2.0 applications get better the more people use them. Since the internet masses are increasingly both the content creators and the content filters (the ones who rate, tag and otherwise filter content to make it easier for others to find good stuff), the more people who weigh in on something the better that becomes.

## Folksonomies and Tagging

In the old days, library scientists and other professional category-makers thought long and hard about how to categorize information so that others could find it. Often they came up with hierarchical categories, like:

Music > Bands > Punk Rock > The Big Boys

Then, 'round about 2004 sometime, Flickr brought a different kind of categorization into the mainstream. This scheme lets any user add one or more "tags" to content, and then these tags become the metadata. Flickr's interface shows the top one hundred and fifty tags of all time in its main tagcloud and weights each one by popularity. The site also lets you search all tags.

The beauty of a folksonomy is that the meta data is written in normal human speech by normal human users, so non-experts can find things easily. And, since folksonomies are community-created, sites that use them need no raft of experts to come up with categorization schemes.

## Give Away Your Secrets

There is more value on the internet to giving away your secrets than hoarding them, for two reasons.

First, if you give valuable information away, people will link to you. This gets you web traffic and significantly boosts your search engine rankings, both of which build your brand and help you sell whatever it is you're selling. Second, there usually isn't much danger of competitors stealing your thunder. On the internet, execution is more important than your brilliant idea.

## Human filters

There are many models of human filtering, from Google's search algorithm (which rates relevancy in part by seeing who else links to a given site and thus uses people who put links on their sites as the human filter) to Ebay's "rate this seller" function; from the five-star rating system you see everywhere to the Friendster model of being able to see friends of friends as a way of meeting people you're apt to like.

## Iterative launches

The best way to launch web products is to first release the smallest parts that will be useful and which can

stand up as a "product." Then, follow this up by watching user behavior closely and letting your users steer the product toward the real demand while adding more features. Leave your product in "beta" for a year or more if you want.

The older model was to launch big scheduled releases, which had the effect of overloading every department in your company in turn. Once launched, it would take a long time to plan the next big launch and everybody tended to be exhausted.

The biggest problem with the old "big release" model is that it required design and development teams to go quite far down the road of development before seeing any real-world user action, which meant that the builders had to make many more predictions about how users would behave before seeing real user behavior.

### **Simplicity and Modularity**

Simple, easy-to-use interfaces are a hallmark of good Web 2.0 product designs. Nothing could be simpler than the Google interfaces. Instead of being Swiss Army knives, sites like Google, Ebay, Flickr, del.icio.us, and Craigslist all do one basic thing and do it well.

When Google launched, there was a thick field of search engines that were each trying to become the one big portal that everyone would use as their home page. Each was filled to the brim with more junk than the last: horoscopes, news feeds, photos, you name it. Google showed everyone that if you build it simple and useful, they will come. Many sites have followed, and the aesthetic that is emerging for many sites is one of ultra-simplicity. Flickr is another good example.